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Savimbi: Reagan promised 'most effective' aid

By James Morrison
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President Reagan has given Jonas Savimbi his personal commitment to provide anti-Marxist rebels in Angola with the "most effective" aid, the guerrilla leader told The Washington Times yesterday.

Mr. Savimbi also told The Times that what he needed most was anti-tank and anti-aircraft weapons.

In a broad-ranging interview on the Angolan war, Mr. Savimbi warned the Gulf-Chevron oil company that his forces would start attacking its oil facilities in Angola if the corporation continued trying to block rebel aid bills in Congress.

And he said his guerrillas had launched a new urban campaign of car bombings and other raids against Cuban and Soviet bloc targets, bringing the 10-year-old bush war to the cities.

Mr. Savimbi, whose Washington visit is as much an image-building campaign as a lobbying effort for U.S. aid, claimed support among 12 black African nations, a statement aimed at dispelling the frequent criticism that his forces are backed only by white-ruled South Africa. He would not name the countries, saying they would be criticized if their names were made public.

The 51-year-old leader of the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA) said his 10-day trip to Washington, which

started last Tuesday, has been successful so far, especially compared to his last visit.

Following President Reagan's first election after a campaign in which he praised the Angolan rebels as freedom fighters, Mr. Savimbi received a "very cold reception" when he came to Washington.

"We expected President Reagan to support us in 1981 because during his campaign he used UNITA as an example, saying we want to help UNITA. So we were surprised when we came here. We got a very cold reception," he said.

During this visit, he has been treated like a head of state, greeted

at the White House by Mr. Reagan, received with diplomatic protocol at the State Department and assigned a special U.S. security detail to guard him.

He has arrived at a time of heightened debate over the Angolan civil war, one of the most curious wars being fought today.

UNITA is fighting a Marxist government, propped up by 35,000 Cuban troops and \$2 billion worth of Soviet weaponry. The government, which has no diplomatic relations with the United States, is funded by American oil companies with the Chevron Corp., the parent company of Gulf, owning nearly half of the Angolan government oil facilities and pumping about \$2 billion a year into the economy.

Liberal opponents of Mr. Savimbi accused him of being a South African "stooge" because he receives his primary support from the Pretoria government. They have also argued that he does not deserve U.S. support because he is a secret Marxist.

Conservatives, who have been mounting a campaign against Chevron-Gulf and in support of U.S. rebel aid, have been pressing the Reagan administration into helping UNITA.

The administration has been internally debating whether to fund Mr. Savimbi openly or secretly and whether U.S. support would torpedo any last hopes of a U.S.-mediated end to the Angolan war. The administration has reportedly proposed \$10 million to \$15 million in covert funds.

Mr. Savimbi said he believed the conservative pressure had helped and that the administration would provide the much-needed aid.

"I believe there is a commitment of aid. There were no figures discussed. But there is a commitment," he told The Washington Times. "The President said he wants to help us in the most effective way. And the most effective way is to give us the aid we are asking for."

Mr. Savimbi, who said he is staying out of the debate over secret or

open aid, said he needs anti-tank and anti-aircraft weapons to combat Soviet-made tanks, MiG jet fighters and Hind 24 helicopter gunships, one of the most devastating weapons in the Angolan arsenal.

"The President was very warm. He was very positive," Mr. Savimbi said.

If his opponents succeed in blocking aid and Mr. Savimbi returns to the African bush empty handed, he said that will be a strong message to the Soviets and Cubans.

"If we come from here — after all the declarations from the administration — and there is no aid, that will invite the Russians to try to cripple UNITA," he said.

But Mr. Savimbi pledged that his 60,000 guerrillas would continue their war even without U.S. help.

One of the forces working against his aid, Mr. Savimbi said, are the corporate lobbyists of the American oil companies in Angola.

He threatened to attack their oil facilities if they continue their lobbying efforts but he pledged not to hurt American oil company workers.

"We want to make sure we will not kill Americans," he said, revealing that UNITA sympathizers employed by the oil companies can inform the

rebels when U.S. citizens are not at work so they can raid the facilities without endangering Americans.

There are no current plans to attack the oil fields, he said.

"But if they continue lobbying, then the case is serious," he said. "I'm telling them if they do not stop lobbying, then the decision [to attack the oil facilities] has to be made."

He said the U.S. oil companies there are "morally guilty" of aiding the Angolan government, but he explained that he understands that the oil executives are businessmen.

"Business is business," Mr. Savimbi said, explaining he has no objection to the oil companies continuing to operate. But when they lobby against UNITA aid on Capitol Hill, "they are not making business. They are making politics. If you take the risk of mixing business and politics, you take the political risks," he said.

Mr. Savimbi also explained a new rebel campaign against urban targets. Last week UNITA claimed responsibility for car bombings in Luanda, Angola's capital, that killed Cubans and East Germans.

"We don't want people to think of us as terrorist," he said. "But we want to start urban guerrilla warfare."

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He said he must bring the war to the cities, through a "selective" campaign of car-bombings, explosives and sniper attacks, to force the Angolan government to reach a political settlement leading to democratic elections.

As his own lobbying efforts receive widespread media attention, his U.S. opponents have also begun their own campaign, which Mr. Savimbi said is "distorted."

He accused one of his most vocal opponents, John Stockwell, a former CIA agent who ran a secret U.S. operation in Angola until Congress stopped all aid in 1975, has tried to discredit Mr. Savimbi and accused him of continuing to receive CIA funds. Congress repealed its restriction on Angolan rebel aid last year.

Although Mr. Stockwell portrays himself as someone who knows the innermost working of UNITA, the rebel leader said the ex-CIA agent met him once for only three hours.

"He does not know me. He does not know UNITA," Mr. Savimbi said.

Addressing the most frequent criticism of his rebel movement, Mr. Savimbi said he receives aid from South Africa because it is offered. But he has always condemned South Africa's racial policies.

"When South Africa said we want to give you aid, we said thank you very much. But we condemned apartheid," he said.

"You must understand, it is the reality of war that when you are fighting and someone extends aid to you, you have to accept," he said.

Mr. Savimbi, is traveling on a diplomatic passport from an unidentified black African nation.

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